

Brother Lawrence
His Letters and
Conversations
on the
Practice of the
Presence
of God



Forward Movement Edition

BROTHER LAWRENCE

His Conversations and
Letters on the Practice
of the Presence of God

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*From the Preface to the Original
French Edition, A.D. 1692*

"Although death has carried off last year many of the Order of the Carmelites Dechausses, brethren who have left in dying rare legacies of lives of virtue; Providence, it would seem, has desired that the eyes of men should be cast chiefly on Brother Lawrence . . .

"Several persons having seen a copy of one of his letters, have desired to see more; and to meet this wish, care has been taken to collect as many as possible of those which Brother Lawrence wrote with his own hand . . .

"All Christians will find herein much that is edifying. Those in the thick of the great world will learn from these letters how greatly they deceive themselves, seeking for peace and joy in the false glitter of the things that are seen, yet temporal: those who are seeking the Highest Good will gain from this book strength to persevere in the practice of virtue. All, whatever their life-work, will find profit, for they will see herein a brother, busied as they are in outward affairs, who in the midst of the most exacting occupations, has learnt so well to accord action with contemplation, that for the space of more than forty years he hardly ever turned from the Presence of God."

FOREWORD

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13.

The world is used to receiving an endless number of books at the hands of clerkly and learned men—soon to forget or reject most of them as no great loss.

But it has a way of treasuring a certain Fisherman's memories taken down by a bright young companion; or the fortunes of a wayfarer grubbed out on paper by a Tinker twelve years in jail. Peter's *Gospel* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* are secure as long as men shall read. And so perhaps is this present little book. Men have been reading it for their good ever since its humble author died just two hundred and fifty years ago.

There must have been something rare in a monastery cook that a Grand Vicar should listen to his talk and go home and make notes of it; and that high-placed persons should beg of him not the recipe for a sauce but his secret of a happy life. This secret, sharp critics may say, is not the whole of wisdom, not a complete system either of philosophy or theology. But even today it is a life-saver to the harried citizen pulled one way by mystery and the other way by matter-of-fact. Your average man will stop and listen to a cook who knows God, when the animadversions of theologians and

philosophers only weary him as babblings in a strange tongue.

Brother Lawrence lived in times strangely like our own. He began life as Nicholas Herman in Lorraine—at one of the many alternations when the province was French. In his boyhood began that 'Thirty Years' War which drew all Europe into its bloody maw—and still has some part in the outraged world of 1941.

No doubt Nicholas Herman was one of millions sucked into that vortex, for first he was a common soldier. Later, he himself tells us "that he had been a footman to Monsieur Fieubert, the treasurer, and that he was a great awkward fellow, who broke everything."

There are all too many of us now past middle age who feel soiled and weary—the bloom rubbed off from our aspirations—our hopes scaled down to the living of a life more mediocre every day. To such it comes like second wind to consort with a man of fifty who takes hold of himself and finds heaven on earth among the pots and pans of an institution's kitchen. We may demur that he was of finer stuff than we; but No, he pleads, I did nothing but let God have His own way with me.

It is in the hope that many will take this bare-footed lay brother at his word, and make his *Practice* their own, that the editor has collated this edition from many of former centuries, and sends it on its way.

Cincinnati, St. James Day, 1941.

CONVERSATIONS

FIRST CONVERSATION

August 3, 1666

THE first time I saw Brother Lawrence was upon the third of August, 1666. He told me that God had done him a singular favor, in his conversion at the age of eighteen.

That in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had perfectly set him loose from the world, and kindled in him such a love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased during the more than forty years he had lived since.

That he had been footman to M. Fieubert, the treasurer, and that he was a great awkward fellow who broke everything.

That he had desired to be received into a monastery, thinking that he would there be made to smart for his awkwardness and the

faults he should commit, and so he should sacrifice to God his life, with its pleasures; but that God had disappointed him, he having met with nothing but satisfaction in that state.

That we should establish in ourselves a sense of God's Presence by continually conversing with Him. That it was a shameful thing to quit His conversation to think of trifles and fooleries.

That we should feed and nourish our souls with high notions of God, which would yield us great joy in being devoted to Him.

That we ought to *quicken*—i.e., to *enliven*—our *faith*. That it was lamentable we had so little; and that instead of taking *faith* for the rule of their conduct, men amused themselves with trivial devotions which changed daily. That the way of faith was the spirit of the Church, and that it was sufficient to bring us to a high degree of perfection.

That we ought to give ourselves up entirely to God, with regard both to things temporal and spiritual, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will, whether He lead us by suffering or by consolation, for all would be equal to a soul truly resigned. That there was need of fidelity in those times of dryness, or insensibility and irksomeness in prayer, by which God tries our love to Him; that *then* was the time for us to make good and effectual acts of resignation, whereof one alone would oftentimes very much promote our spiritual advancement.

That as for the miseries and sins he heard of daily in the world, he was so far from wondering at them that, on the contrary, he was surprised

that there were not more, considering the malice sinners were capable of; that, for his part, he prayed for them; but knowing that God could remedy the mischiefs they did, when He pleased, he gave himself no further trouble.

That to arrive at such resignation as God requires, we should watch attentively over all the passions which mingle as well in spiritual things as in those of a grosser nature; that God would give light concerning those passions to those who truly desire to serve Him. That if this was my design, *viz.*, sincerely to serve God, I might come to him (Brother Lawrence) as often as I pleased, without any fear of being troublesome; but if not, that I ought no more to visit him.

SECOND CONVERSATION

September 28, 1666

That he had always been governed by love, without selfish views; and that having resolved to make the love of God the *end* of all his actions, he had found good reason to be well satisfied with his method. That he was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.

That he had been long troubled in mind from a sure belief that he was lost; that all the men in the world could not have persuaded him to the contrary; but that he had thus reasoned with

himself about it: *I engaged in a religious life only for the love of God, and I have endeavored to act only for Him; whatever becomes of me, whether I be lost or saved, I will always continue to act purely for the love of God. I shall have this good at least, that till death I shall have done all that is in me to love Him.* That this trouble of mind had lasted four years, during which time he had suffered much; but that at last he had seen that this trouble arose from want of faith, and that since then he had passed his life in perfect liberty and continual joy. That he had placed his sins betwixt him and God, as it were to tell Him that he did not deserve His favors, but that God still continued to bestow them in abundance.

That in order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must at first apply to Him with some diligence; but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty.

That he expected, after the pleasant days God had given him, he should have his turn of pain and suffering; but that he was not uneasy about it, knowing very well that as he could do nothing of himself, God would not fail to give him the strength to bear it.

That when an occasion of practising some virtue offered, he addressed himself to God, saying, *Lord, I cannot do this unless Thou enablest me;* and that then he received strength more than sufficient.

That when he had failed in his duty, he

simply confessed his fault, saying to God, *I shall never do otherwise if Thou leavest me to myself; it is Thou who must hinder my falling, and mend what is amiss.* That after this he gave himself no further uneasiness about it.

That we ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs just as they happen. That God never failed to grant it, as he had often experienced.

That he had been lately sent into Burgundy to buy the provision of wine for the Society, which was a very unwelcome task to him, because he had no turn for business, and because he was lame and could not go about the boat but by rolling himself over the casks. That, however, he gave himself no uneasiness about it, nor about the purchase of the wine. That he said to God, *It was His business he was about,* and that afterwards he found it very well performed. That he had been sent into Auvergne the year before upon the same account; that he could not tell how the matter passed, but that it proved very well.

So, likewise, in his business in the kitchen (to which he had naturally a great aversion), having accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God, and with prayer, upon all occasions, for His grace to do his work well, he had found everything easy during the fifteen years that he had been employed there.

That he was very well pleased with the post he was now in; but that he was as ready to quit that as the former, since he was always finding

pleasure in every condition by doing little things for the love of God.

That with him the *set* times of prayer were not different from other times; that he retired to pray, according to the directions of his Superior, but that he did not want such retirement, nor ask for it, because his greatest business did not divert him from God.

That as he knew his obligation to love God in all things, and as he endeavored so to do, he had no need of a *director* to advise him, but that he needed much a *confessor* to absolve him. That he was very sensible of his faults, but not discouraged by them; that he confessed them to God, but did not plead against Him to excuse them. When he had so done, he peaceably resumed his usual practice of love and adoration.

That in his trouble of mind he had consulted nobody, but knowing only by the light of faith that God was present, he contented himself with directing all his actions to Him, *i.e.*, doing them with a desire to please Him, let what would come of it.

That useless thoughts spoil all; that the mischief began there, but that we ought to reject them as soon as we perceived their impertinence to the matter in hand or to our salvation, and return to our communion with God.

That at the beginning he had often passed his time appointed for prayer in rejecting wandering thoughts and falling back into them. That he could never regulate his devotion by certain methods as some do. That, nevertheless, at first he had *meditated* for some time, but afterwards

that went off in a manner he could give no account of.

That all bodily mortifications and other exercises are useless, except as they serve to arrive at the union with God by love; that he had well considered this, and found it the shortest way to go straight to Him by a continual practice of love and doing all things for His sake.

That we ought to make a great difference between the acts of the *understanding* and those of the *will*; that the first were comparatively of little value, and the others, all. That our only business was to love and delight ourselves in God.

That all possible kinds of mortification, if they were devoid of the love of God, could not efface a single sin. That we ought without anxiety to expect the pardon of our sins from the blood of Jesus Christ, laboring simply to love Him with all our hearts. That God seemed to have granted the greatest favors to the greatest sinners, as more signal monuments of His mercy.

That the greatest pains or pleasures of this world were not to be compared with what he had experienced of both kinds in a spiritual state; so that he was careful for nothing and feared nothing, desiring only one thing of God, *viz.*, that he might not offend Him.

That he had no qualms; for, said he, when I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, *I am used to do so; I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself.* If I fail not, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that the strength comes from Him.

THIRD CONVERSATION

November 22, 1666

He told me that the *foundation of the spiritual life* in him had been a high notion and esteem of God in faith; which when he had once well conceived, he had no other care but faithfully to reject at once every other thought, *that he might perform all his actions for the love of God*. That when sometimes he had not thought of God for a good while, he did not disquiet himself for it; but after having acknowledged his wretchedness to God, he returned to Him with so much the greater trust in Him as he had found himself wretched through forgetting Him.

That the trust we put in God honors Him much and draws down great graces.

That it was impossible not only that God should deceive, but also that He should long let a soul suffer which is perfectly surrendered to Him, and resolved to endure everything for His sake.

That he had so often experienced the ready succor of Divine Grace upon all occasions, that from the same experience, when he had business to do, he did not think of it beforehand; but when it was time to do it, he found in God, as in a clear mirror, all that was fit for him to do. That of late he had acted thus, without anticipating care; but before the experience above

mentioned, he had been full of care and anxiety in his affairs.

That he had no recollection of what things he had done, once they were past, and hardly realized them when he was about them: that on leaving table, he knew not what he had been eating; but that with one single end in view, he did all for the love of God, rendering Him thanks for that He had directed these acts, and an infinity of others throughout his life: he did all very simply, in a manner which kept him ever steadfastly in the loving Presence of God.

When outward business diverted him a little from the thought of God, a fresh remembrance coming from God invested his soul, and so inflamed and transported him that it was difficult for him to restrain himself.

That he was more united to God in his ordinary occupations than when he left them for devotion in retirement, from which he knew himself to issue with much dryness of spirit.

That he expected hereafter some great pain of body or mind; that the worst that could happen to him would be to lose that sense of God which he had enjoyed so long; but that the goodness of God assured him that He would not forsake him utterly, and that He would give him strength to bear whatever evil He permitted to happen to him; and therefore that he feared nothing, and had no occasion to consult with anybody about his soul. That when he had attempted to do it, he had always come away more perplexed; and that as he was conscious of his readiness to lay down his life for the love

of God, he had no apprehension of danger. That perfect abandonment to God was the sure way to heaven, a way on which we had always sufficient light for our conduct.

That in the beginning of the spiritual life we ought to be faithful in doing our duty and denying ourselves; but after that, unspeakable pleasures followed. That in difficulties we need only have recourse to Jesus Christ and beg His grace; with that everything became easy.

That many do not advance in the Christian progress because they stick in penances and particular exercises, while they neglect the love of God, which is the *end*. That this appeared plainly by their works, and was the reason why we see so little solid virtue.

That there was need neither of art nor science for going to God, but only a heart resolutely determined to apply itself to nothing but Him, or for *His* sake, and to love Him only.

FOURTH CONVERSATION

November 25, 1667

He discoursed with me very fervently and with great openness of heart, concerning his manner of *going to God*, whereof some part is related already.

He told me that all consists in *one hearty renunciation* of everything which does not lead us

to God in order that we may accustom ourselves to a continual conversation with Him, with freedom and in simplicity. That we need only to recognize God intimately present with us, and to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us; offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done.

That in this conversation with God we are also employed in praising, adoring, and loving Him unceasingly, for His infinite goodness and perfection.

That without being discouraged on account of our sins, we should pray for His grace with perfect confidence, relying upon the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. That God never failed to offer us His grace at every action; that he distinctly perceived it, and never failed of it, unless when his thoughts had wandered from a sense of God's Presence, or he had forgotten to ask His assistance.

That God always gave us light in our doubts when we had no other design but to please Him, and to act for His love.

That our sanctification did not depend upon *changing* our works, but in doing that for God's sake which commonly we do for our own. That it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain works, which they performed very imperfectly, by reason of their human or selfish regards.

That the most excellent method he had found of going to God was that of *doing our common business* without any view of pleasing men,* and (as far as we are capable) *purely for the love of God*.

That it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times ; that we are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the time of action as by prayer in the season of prayer.

That his view of prayer was nothing else but a sense of the Presence of God, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but Divine Love ; and that when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy ; yet hoped that God would give him somewhat to suffer when he should have grown stronger.

That we ought, once for all, heartily to put our whole trust in God, and make a full surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us.

That we ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. That we should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors, but that at last we should gain a habit, which will naturally produce its acts in us, without our care, and to our exceeding great delight.

* Galatians i. 10; Ephesians vi. 5, 6.

That the whole substance of religion was faith, hope, and love, by the practice of which we become united to the will of God; that all besides is indifferent, and to be used only as a means that we may arrive at our end, and be swallowed up therein, by faith and love.

That all things are possible to him who *believes*; that they are less difficult to him who *hopes*; that they are more easy to him who *loves*, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.

That the end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshippers of God we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity.

That when we enter upon the spiritual life, we should consider and examine to the bottom what we are. And then we should find ourselves worthy of all contempt, and not deserving indeed the name of Christians; subject to all kinds of misery and numberless accidents, which trouble us and cause perpetual vicissitudes in our health, in our humors, in our internal and external dispositions; in short, persons whom God would humble by many pains and labors, within as well as without. After this we should not wonder that troubles, temptations, oppositions, and contradictions happen to us from men. We ought, on the contrary, to submit ourselves to them, and bear them as long as God pleases, as things highly beneficial to us.

That the greater perfection a soul aspires after, the more dependent it is upon Divine Grace.

* Being questioned by one of his own Society (to whom he was obliged to open himself) by what means he had attained such an habitual sense of God, he told him that, since his first coming to the monastery, he had considered God as the *end* of all his thoughts and desires, as the mark to which they should tend, and in which they should terminate.

That in the beginning of his novitiate he spent the hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of God, so as to convince his mind of, and to impress deeply upon his heart, the Divine existence, rather by devout sentiments, and submission to the lights of faith, than by studied reasonings and elaborate meditations. That by this short and sure method he exercised himself in the knowledge and love of God, resolving to use his utmost endeavor to live in a continual sense of His Presence, and, if possible, never to forget Him more.

That when he had thus in prayer filled his mind with great sentiments of that Infinite Being, he went to his work appointed in the kitchen (for he was cook to the Society). There having first considered severally the things his office required, and when and how each thing was to be done, he spent all the intervals of his time, as well before as after his work, in prayer.

That when he began his business, he said to God, with a filial trust in Him: *O my God, since Thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience*

* The particulars which follow are collected from other accounts of Brother Lawrence.

to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech Thee to grant me the grace to continue in Thy Presence; and to this end do Thou prosper me with Thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections.

[“We can do *little* things for God. I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.”]

As he proceeded in his work he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering to Him all his actions.

When he had finished he examined himself how he had discharged his duty; if he found *well*, he returned thanks to God; if otherwise, he asked pardon; and without being discouraged, he set his mind right again, and continued his exercise of the *Presence of God*, as if he had never deviated from it. “Thus,” said he, “by rising after my falls, and by frequently renewed acts of faith and love, I am come to a state wherein it would be as difficult for me not to think of God as it was at first to accustom myself to it.”

As Brother Lawrence had found such comfort and blessing in walking in the Presence of God, it was natural for him to recommend it earnestly to others; but his example was a stronger inducement than any arguments he could propose. His

very countenance was edifying; such a sweet and calm devotion appearing in it as could not but affect all beholders. And it was observed that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen, he still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquillity of spirit. "The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."

LETTERS

FIRST LETTER

My Reverend Mother: Since you desire so earnestly that I should communicate to you the method by which I arrived at that *habitual sense of God's Presence*, which our Lord, of His mercy, has been pleased to vouchsafe to me, I must tell you that it is with great difficulty that I am prevailed on by your importunities; and now I do it only upon the terms that you show my letter to nobody. If I knew that you would let it be seen, all the desire that I have for your perfection would not be able to determine me to it.

The account I can give you is this.

Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing else than how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the *all* for the *all*; so after having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, *I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not His, and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the*

world. Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge ; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my Father, as my God. I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandering from Him. I found no small trouble in this exercise, and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that I encountered, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily. I made this my business as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer ; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God.

Such has been my common practice ever since I entered monastic life ; and though I have done it very imperfectly, yet I have found great advantages by it. These, I well know, are to be imputed solely to the mercy and goodness of God, because we can do nothing without Him, and *I* still less than any. But when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him and doing anything that may displease Him, at least wilfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and, if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In short, by often repeating these acts, they become *habitual*, and the *Presence of God* is rendered as it were *natural* to us. Give Him thanks,

if you please, with me, for His great goodness toward me, which I can never sufficiently marvel at, for the many favors He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him. Amen.

I am, in our Lord, Yours, ——

SECOND LETTER

My Reverend Mother: I have taken this opportunity to communicate to you the thoughts of one of our Society, concerning the wonderful effect and continual succor which he receives from *the Presence of God*. Let you and me both profit by them.

You must know that during the forty years and more that he has spent in religion, his continual care has been to be *always with God*; and to do nothing, say nothing, and think nothing which may displease Him, and this without any other view than purely for the love of Him, and because He deserves infinitely more.

He is now so accustomed to that *Divine Presence* that he receives from it continual succor upon all occasions. For above thirty years his soul has been filled with joys so continual, and sometimes so transcendent, that he is forced to used means to moderate them, and to prevent their appearing outwardly.

If sometimes he is a little too much absent from the *Divine Presence*, which happens often

when he is most engaged in his outward business, God presently makes Himself felt in his soul to recall him. He answers with exact fidelity to these inward drawings, either by an elevation of his heart toward God, or by a meek and loving regard to Him; or by such words as love forms upon these occasions, as for instance, *My God, behold me, wholly Thine: Lord, make me according to Thy heart.* And then it seems to him (as in effect he feels it) that this God of love, satisfied with such few words, reposes again, and rests in the depth and center of his soul. The experience of these things gives him such an assurance that God is always deep within his soul, that no doubt of it can arise, whatever may betide.

Judge from this what contentment and satisfaction he enjoys, feeling continually within him so great a treasure. No longer is he in anxious search after it, but he has it open before him, free to take of it what he pleases.

He complains much of our blindness, and exclaims often that we are to be pitied who content ourselves with so little. *God's treasure*, he says, *is like an infinite ocean, yet a little wave of feeling, passing with the moment, contents us. Blind as we are, we hinder God and stop the current of His graces. But when He finds a soul permeated with a living faith, He pours into it His graces and favors plenteously; into the soul they flow like a torrent which, after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads with impetuosity its pent-up flood.*

Yes, we often stop this torrent by the little value we set upon it. But let us stop it no longer ; let us enter into ourselves and break down the barrier which holds it back. Let us make the most of the day of grace ; let us redeem the time that is lost, for perhaps we have but little left. Death follows us close ; let us be well prepared for it ; for we die but once, and a miscarriage *then* is irretrievable.

I say again, let us enter into ourselves. Time presses, there is no room for delay ; our souls are at stake. You, I believe, have taken such effectual measures that you will not be surprised. I commend you for it ; it is the one thing needful. We must, nevertheless, always work at it, for, in the spiritual life, not to advance is to go back. But those whose spirits are stirred by the breath of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep. If the vessel of our soul is still tossed with winds and storms, let us awake the Lord, who reposes in it, and He will quickly calm the sea.

I have taken the liberty to impart to you these good thoughts, that you may compare them with your own. It will serve again to rekindle and inflame them, if by misfortune (which God forbid, for it would be indeed a great misfortune) they should be, though never so little, cooled. Let us then *both* recall our early fervor. Let us profit by the example and thoughts of this brother, who is little known of the world, but known of God, and abundantly blessed by Him. I will pray for you ; do you pray instantly for me. I am, in our Lord,

Yours, —

June 1, 1682

THIRD LETTER

My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother: I have received today two books and a letter from Sister ——, who is preparing to make her “profession,” and upon that account desires the prayers of your holy Community, and yours in particular. I perceive that she reckons much upon them; pray do not disappoint her. Beg of God that she may make her sacrifice in the view of His love alone, and with firm resolution to be wholly devoted to Him. I will send you one of these books, which treat of *the Presence of God*, a subject which in my opinion contains the whole spiritual life; and it seems to me that whoever duly practises it will soon become spiritual.

I know that for the right practice of it the heart must be empty of all else, because God wills to possess the heart *alone*; and as He cannot possess it *alone* unless it be empty of all besides, so He cannot work in it what He would, unless it be left vacant to Him.

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual walk with God. Those only can comprehend it who practise and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive. It is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from the motive of love, and because God would have us so walk.

Were I a preacher, I should, above all other things, preach *the practice of the Presence of God*; and were I a "director," I should advise all the world to do it, so necessary do I think it, and so easy, too.

Ah! knew we but the need we have of the grace and assistance of God, we should never lose sight of Him—no, not for a moment. Believe me; this very instant, make a holy and firm resolution nevermore wilfully to stray from Him, and to live the rest of your days *in His sacred Presence*, for love of Him surrendering, if He think fit, all other pleasures.

Set heartily about this work, and if you perform it as you ought, be assured that you will soon find the effects of it. I will assist you with my prayers, poor as they are. I commend myself earnestly to yours and those of your holy Community, being theirs, and more particularly

1685

Yours, —

FOURTH LETTER

To the Same: I have received from Mdlle. — the things which you gave her for me. I wonder that you have not given me your thoughts on the little book I sent to you, and which you must have received. Pray, set heartily about the practice of it in your old age; it is better late than never.

I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without *the practice of the Presence of God*. For my part, I keep myself retired with Him in the very center of my soul as much as I can ; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing, but the least turning away from Him is to me insupportable.

This exercise does not much fatigue the body ; yet it is proper to deprive it sometimes, nay often, of many little pleasures which are innocent and lawful, for God will not permit that a soul which desires to be devoted entirely to Him should take other pleasures than with Him : that is more than reasonable.

I do not say that therefore we must put any violent constraint upon ourselves. No, we must serve God in a holy freedom ; we must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God meekly, and with tranquillity, as often as we find it wandering from Him.

It is, however, necessary to put our whole trust in God, laying aside all other cares, and even some particular forms of devotion, though very good in themselves, yet such as one often engages in unreasonably, because these devotions are only means to attain to the end. So when by this *practice of the Presence of God* we are *with Him* who is *our End*, it is then useless to return to the means. Then it is that abiding in His holy Presence, we may continue our commerce of love,

now by an act of adoration, of praise, or of desire; now by an act of sacrifice or of thanksgiving, and in all the manners which our mind can devise.

Be not discouraged by the repugnance which you may find to it from nature; you must do yourself violence. Often, at the onset, one thinks it is lost time; but you must go on, and resolve to persevere in it till death, notwithstanding all the difficulties that may occur. I commend myself to the prayers of your holy Community, and to yours in particular. I am, in our Lord,

Yours, ——

November 3, 1685

FIFTH LETTER

Madame: I pity you much. It will be of great importance if you can leave the care of your affairs to M. and Mme. ——, and spend the remainder of your life only in worshipping God. He lays no great burden upon us: a little remembrance of Him from time to time; a little adoration; sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sorrows, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the benefits He has given you, and still gives you, in the midst of your troubles. He asks you to console yourself with Him the oftenest you can. Lift up your

heart to Him even at your meals and when you are in company; the least little remembrance will always be acceptable to Him. You need not cry very loud; He is nearer to us than we think.

To be with God, there is no need to be continually in church. We may make an oratory of our heart wherein to retire from time to time to converse with Him in meekness, humility, and love. Every one is capable of such familiar conversation with God, some more, some less. He knows what we can do. Let us begin, then. Perhaps He is just waiting for one generous resolution on our part. Have courage. We have but little time to live; you are near sixty-four, and I am almost eighty. Let us live and die with God. Sufferings will be sweet and pleasant to us while we are with Him; and without Him, the greatest pleasures will be anguish to us. May He be blessed for all, Amen.

Accustom yourself, then, by degrees thus to worship Him, to beg His grace, to offer Him your heart from time to time in the midst of your business, even every moment, if you can. Do not scrupulously confine yourself to fixed rules, or particular forms of devotion, but act with faith in God, with love and humility. You may assure M. and Mme. and Mdlle. — of my poor prayers, and that I am their servant, and particularly

Yours in our Lord, —

SIXTH LETTER

My Reverend Father: Not finding my manner of life in books, although I have no difficulty about it, yet, for greater security, I shall be glad to know your thoughts concerning it.

In a conversation some days since with a person of piety, he told me that the spiritual life was a life of grace, which begins with servile fear, which is increased by hope of eternal life, and which is consummated by pure love; that each of these states had its different stages, by which one arrives at last at that blessed consummation.

I have not followed all these methods. On the contrary, from I know not what instincts, I found that they discouraged me. This was the reason why, at my entrance into religion, I resolved to give myself up to God as the best satisfaction I could make for my sins, and for the love of Him to renounce all besides.

For the first years I commonly employed myself during the time set apart for devotion with the thought of death, judgment, heaven, hell, and my sins. Thus I continued some years, applying my mind carefully the rest of the day, and even in the midst of my business, *to the Presence of God*, whom I considered always as *with me*, often as *in me*.

At length I came insensibly to do the same thing during my set time of prayer, which

caused in me great delight and consolation. This practice produced in me so high an esteem for God that *faith* alone was capable to satisfy me in that point.

Such was my beginning; and yet I must tell you that for the first ten years I suffered much. The apprehension that I was not devoted to God as I wished to be, my past sins always present to my mind, and the great unmerited favors which God bestowed on me, were the matter and source of my sufferings. During this time I fell often, yet as often rose again. It seemed to me that all creation, reason, and God Himself were against me, and *faith* alone for me. I was troubled sometimes with thoughts that to believe I had received such favors was an effect of my presumption, which pretended to be *at once* where others arrive only with difficulty; at other times, that it was a wilful delusion, and that there was no salvation for me.

When I thought of nothing but to end my days in these times of trouble and disquiet (which did not at all diminish the trust I had in God, and which served only to increase my faith), I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which till that time was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace, as if it had found its center and place of rest.

Ever since that time I walk before God in simple faith, with humility and with love, and I apply myself diligently to do nothing and think nothing which may displease Him. I hope that when I have done what I can, He will do with me what He pleases.

As for what passes in me at present, I cannot express it. I have no pain nor any doubt as to my state, because I have no will but that of God, which I endeavor to carry out in all things, and to which I am so submissive that I would not take up a straw from the ground against His order, or from any other motive than purely that of love to Him.

I have quitted all forms of devotion and set prayers but those to which my state obliges me. And I make it my only business to persevere in His holy Presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and an absorbing passionate regard to God, which I may call an *actual Presence of God*; or, to speak better, a silent and secret conversation of the soul with God . . .

If sometimes my thoughts wander from it by necessity or infirmity, I am soon recalled by inward emotions so charming and delightful that I am confused to mention them. I beg you to reflect rather upon my great wretchedness, of which you are fully informed, than upon the great favors which God does me, all unworthy and ungrateful as I am.

As for my set hours of prayer, they are only a continuation of the same exercise. Sometimes I consider myself there as a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue; presenting myself thus before God, I desire Him to form His perfect image in my soul, and make me entirely like Himself.

At other times, when I apply myself to prayer, I feel all my spirit and all my soul lift itself up without any trouble or effort of mine, and it re-

mains as it were in elevation, fixed firm in God as in its center and its resting-place.

I know that some charge this state with inactivity, delusion, and self-love. I confess that it is a holy inactivity, and would be a happy self-love were the soul in that state capable of such; because, in fact, while the soul is in this repose, it cannot be troubled by such acts as it was formerly accustomed to, and which were then its support, but which would now rather injure than assist it.

Yet I cannot bear that this should be called delusion, because the soul which thus enjoys God desires herein nothing but Him. If this be delusion in me, it belongs to God to remedy it. May He do with me what He pleases; I desire only Him, and to be wholly devoted to Him. You will, however, oblige me in sending me your opinion, to which I always pay a great deference, for I have a singular esteem for your Reverence, and am, in our Lord, my Reverend Father,

Yours, —

SEVENTH LETTER

My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother:
My prayers, of little worth though they be, will not fail you; I have promised it, and I will keep my word. How happy we might be, if only we could find the Treasure, of which the Gospel

tells us—all else would seem to us nothing. How infinite it is! The more one toils and searches in it, the greater are the riches that one finds. Let us toil therefore unceasingly in this search, and let us not grow weary and leave off, till we have found . . .

I know not what I shall become: it seems to me that peace of soul and repose of spirit descend on me, even in sleep. To be without the sense of this peace would be affliction indeed; but with this calm in my soul even for purgatory I would console myself.

I know not what God purposes with me, or keeps me for; I am in a calm so great that I fear nought. What can I fear, when I am with Him? And with Him, in His Presence, I hold myself the most I can. May all things praise Him. Amen.

Yours, —

EIGHTH LETTER

Madame: We have a God who is infinitely gracious and knows all our wants. I always thought that He would reduce you to extremity. He will come in His own time, and when you least expect it. Hope in Him more than ever; thank Him with me for the favors He does you, particularly for the fortitude and patience which He gives you in your afflictions. It is a plain mark of the care He takes of you. Comfort yourself, then, with Him, and give thanks for all.

I admire also the fortitude and bravery of M. ——. God has given him a good disposition and a good will; but there is in him still a little of the world and a great deal of youth. I hope the affliction which God has sent him will prove a wholesome medicine to him, and make him take stock of himself. It is an accident which should engage him to put all his trust in *Him* who accompanies him everywhere. Let him think of Him as often as he can, especially in the greatest dangers. A little lifting up of the heart suffices. A little remembrance of God, one act of inward worship, though upon a march and sword in hand, are prayers which, however short, are nevertheless very acceptable to God; and far from lessening a soldier's courage in occasions of danger, they best serve to fortify it.

Let him think then of God the most he can. Let him accustom himself, by degrees, to this small but holy exercise. No one will notice it, and nothing is easier than to repeat often in the day these little acts of inward worship. Recommend to him, if you please, that he think of God the most he can, in the manner here directed. It is very fit and most necessary for a soldier, who is daily in danger of his life, and often of his salvation. I hope that God will assist him and all the family, to whom I present my service, being theirs and in particular Yours, —

October 12, 1688

NINTH LETTER

(Concerning Wandering Thoughts in Prayer)

My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother:
You tell me nothing new; you are not the only one that is troubled with wandering thoughts. Our mind is extremely roving; but, as the will is mistress of all our faculties, she must recall them, and carry them to God as their last End.

When the mind, for lack of discipline when first we engaged in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, such habits are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to things of the earth.

I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer; many words and long discourses being often the occasions of wandering. Hold yourself in prayer before God like a poor, dumb, paralytic beggar at a rich man's gate. Let it be *your business* to keep your mind in *the Presence of the Lord*. If it sometimes wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that: trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to recall it; the will must bring it back in tranquillity. If you persevere with your whole strength, God will have pity on you.

One way to recall the mind easily in the time of prayer, and preserve it more in tranquillity, is *not to let it wander too far at other times*. You should keep it strictly in *the Presence of God*; and being accustomed to think of Him often, you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.

I have told you already at large, in my former letters, of the advantages we may draw from this *practice of the Presence of God*. Let us set about it seriously, and pray for one another,

Yours, —

TENTH LETTER

To the Same: The inclosed is an answer to that which I received from our good Sister —; pray deliver it to her. She seems to me full of good will, but she wants to go faster than grace. One does not become holy all at once. I commend her to you; we ought to help one another by our advice, and still more by our good examples. You will oblige me by letting me hear of her from time to time, and whether she be very fervent and very obedient.

Let us thus think often that our only business in this life is to please God, and that all besides is perhaps but folly and vanity. You and I have lived a monastic life more than forty years. Have

we employed those years in loving and serving God, who by His mercy has called us to this state, and for that very end? I am filled with shame and confusion when I reflect, on one hand, upon the great favors which God has bestowed and is still bestowing upon me; and, on the other, upon the ill use I have made of them, and my small advancement in the way of perfection.

Since by His mercy He gives us still a little time, let us begin in earnest; let us repair the lost time; let us return with a whole-hearted trust to that *Father of mercies*, who is always ready to receive us into His loving arms. Let us renounce and renounce generously, with single heart, for the love of Him, all that is not His; He deserves infinitely more. Let us think of Him perpetually. Let us put all our trust in Him. I doubt not but that we shall soon find the effects of it in receiving the abundance of His grace, with which we can do all things, and without which we can do nothing but sin.

We cannot escape the dangers which abound in life without the actual and *continual* help of God. Let us, then, pray to Him for it *continually*. How can we pray to Him without being with Him? How can we be with Him but in thinking of Him often? And how can we often think of Him unless by a holy habit of thought which we should form? You will tell me that I am always saying the same thing. It is true, for this is the best and easiest method I know; and as I use no other, I advise all the world to do it. We must *know* before we can *love*. In order to

know God, we must often *think* of Him; and when we come to *love* Him, we shall then also think of Him often, for our heart will be with our treasure. This is an argument which well deserves your consideration.

I am, Yours, —

March 28, 1689

ELEVENTH LETTER

Madame: I have had a good deal of difficulty to bring myself to write to M. —, and I do it now purely because you and Mme. — desire me. Pray write the directions and send it to him. I am very well pleased with the trust which you have in God; I wish that He may increase it in you more and more. We cannot have too much confidence in so good and faithful a Friend, who will never fail us in this world or the next.

If M. — knows how to profit by the loss he has had, and puts all his confidence in God, He will soon give him another friend, more powerful and more inclined to serve him. He disposes of hearts as He pleases. Perhaps M. — was too much attached to him he has lost. We ought to love our friends, but without encroaching upon our chief love which is due to God.

Remember, I pray you, what I have often recommended, which is, to think often on God, by day, by night, in your business, and even in

your diversions. He is always near you and with you ; leave Him not alone. You would think it rude to leave a friend alone who came to visit you ; why, then, must God be neglected ? Do not, then, forget Him, but think on Him often, adore Him continually, live and die with Him ; this is the glorious employment of a Christian. In a word, this is our profession ; if we do not know it, we must learn it. I will endeavor to help you with my prayers, and am, in our Lord,

Yours, —

October 29, 1689

TWELFTH LETTER

My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother :

I do not pray that you may be delivered from your troubles, but I pray God earnestly that He would give you strength and patience to bear them as long as He pleases. Comfort yourself with Him who holds you fastened to the cross. He will loose you when He thinks fit. Happy those who suffer with Him. Accustom yourself to suffer in that manner, and seek from Him the strength to endure as much and as long as He shall judge to be necessary for you. The men of the world do not comprehend these truths, nor is it to be wondered at, since they suffer as lovers of the world, and not as lovers of Christ. They consider sickness as a pain of nature, and not as from God ; and seeing it only in that light, they find nothing in it but grief and distress. But

those who consider sickness as coming from the hand of God, as the effect of His mercy, and the means which He employs for their salvation—such commonly find in it great consolation.

I wish you could convince yourself that God is often nearer to us, and more effectually present with us, in sickness than in health. Rely upon no other physician; for, according to my apprehension, He reserves your cure to Himself. Put, then, all your trust in Him, and you will soon find the effects of it in your recovery, which we often retard by putting greater confidence in medicine than in God.

Whatever remedies you make use of, they will succeed only so far as He permits. When pains come from God, He alone can cure them. He often sends diseases of the body to cure those of the soul. Comfort yourself with the sovereign Physician both of the soul and body.

I foresee that you will tell me that I am very much at my ease, that I eat and drink at the table of the Lord. You are right: but think you that it would be a small pain to the greatest criminal in the world to eat at his king's table and to be served by his king's hands, without however being assured of pardon? I believe that he would feel exceeding great uneasiness, and such as nothing could moderate, save only his trust in the goodness of his sovereign. So I can assure you that whatever pleasures I taste at the table of my King, my sins ever present before my eyes, as well as the uncertainty of my pardon, torment me: though in truth, that torment itself is pleasing.

Be satisfied with the state in which God places you ; however happy you may think me, I envy you. Pains and sufferings would be a paradise to me while I should suffer with my God, and the greatest pleasures would be a hell to me if I could relish them without Him. All my joy would be to suffer something for His sake.

I must, in a little time, go to God. What comforts me in this life is that I now see Him by *faith* ; and I see Him in such a manner as might make me say sometimes, *I believe no more, but I see*. I feel what faith teaches us, and in that assurance and that practice of faith I will live and die with Him.

Continue, then, always with God ; it is the only support and comfort for your affliction. I shall beseech Him to be with you. I present my service to the Reverend Mother Superior, and commend myself to your prayers, and am, in our Lord,

Yours, —

November 17, 1690

THIRTEENTH LETTER

My Good Mother: If we were well accustomed to the exercise of *the Presence of God*, all bodily diseases would be much alleviated thereby. God often permits that we should suffer a little to purify our souls and oblige us to con-

tinue *with Him*. I cannot understand how a soul, which is with God and which desires Him alone, can feel pain : I have had enough experience to banish all doubt that it can.

Take courage ; offer Him your pains unceasingly ; pray to Him for strength to endure them. Above all, acquire a habit of conversing often with God, and forget Him the least you can. Adore Him in your infirmities, offer yourself to Him from time to time, and in the very height of your sufferings beseech Him humbly and affectionately (as a child his good father) to grant you the aid of His grace and to make you conformable to His holy will. I shall endeavor to help you with my poor halting prayers.

God has many ways of drawing us to Himself. He sometimes hides Himself from us ; but *faith* alone, which will not fail us in time of need, ought to be our support, and the foundation of our confidence, which must be all in God.

I know not how God will dispose of me. Happiness grows upon me. The whole world suffers ; yet I, who deserve the severest discipline, feel joys so continual and so great that I can scarce contain them.

I would willingly ask of God a share of your sufferings, but that I know my weakness, which is so great that if He left me one moment to myself I should be the most wretched man alive. And yet I know not how He can leave me alone, because faith gives me as strong a conviction as sense can do that He never forsakes us until we have first forsaken Him. Let us fear to leave

Him. Let us be always with Him. Let us live and die in His Presence. Do you pray for me as I for you.

I am, Yours, —

November 28, 1690

FOURTEENTH LETTER

To the Same: I am in pain to see you suffer so long. What gives me some ease and sweetens the sorrow I have for your griefs is that I am convinced that they are tokens of God's love for you. Look at them in this light and you will bear them more easily. As your case is, it is my opinion that you should leave off human remedies, and resign yourself entirely to the providence of God. Perhaps He stays only for that resignation and a perfect trust in Him to cure you. Since, notwithstanding all your cares, medicine has hitherto proved unsuccessful, and your malady still increases, it will not be tempting God to abandon yourself into His hands and expect all from Him.

I told you in my last that He sometimes permits the body to suffer to cure the sickness of the soul. Have courage, then; make a virtue of necessity. Ask of God, not deliverance from the body's pains, but strength to bear resolutely, for the love of Him, all that He should please, and as long as He shall desire.

Such prayers, indeed, are a little hard to nature, but most acceptable to God, and sweet to

those that love Him. Love sweetens pain ; and when one loves God, one suffers for His sake with joy and courage. Do you so, I beseech you ; comfort yourself with Him, who is the only Physician of all our ills. He is the Father of the afflicted, always ready to help us. He loves us infinitely, more than we imagine. Love Him, then, and seek no other relief than in Him. I hope you will soon receive it. Adieu. I will help you with my prayers, poor as they are, and shall always be, in our Lord,

Yours, —

FIFTEENTH LETTER

To the Same: I render thanks to our Lord for having relieved you a little, according to your desire. I have been often near expiring, but I never was so much satisfied as then. Accordingly, I did not pray for any relief, but I prayed for strength to suffer with courage, humility, and love. Ah, how sweet it is to suffer with God ! However great the sufferings may be, receive them with love. It is paradise to suffer and be with Him ; so that if even now in this life we would enjoy the peace of paradise, we must accustom ourselves to a familiar, humble, affectionate conversation with Him. We must prevent our spirits' wandering from Him upon any occasion. We must make our heart a spiritual temple, wherein to adore Him unceas-

ingly. We must watch continually over ourselves, that we may not do nor say nor think anything that may displease Him. When our minds are thus filled with God, suffering will become full of sweetness, and of quiet joy.

I know that to arrive at this state the beginning is very difficult, for we must act purely in faith. But though it is difficult, we know also that we can do all things with the grace of God, which He never refuses to them who ask it earnestly. Knock, keep on knocking, and I answer for it that He will open to you in His due time, and grant you all at once what He has deferred many years. Adieu. Pray to Him for me as I pray to Him for you. I hope to see Him very soon.

I am, Yours, ——

January 22, 1691

SIXTEENTH LETTER

To the Same: God knoweth best what is needful for us, and all that He does is for our good. If we knew how much He loves us, we should always be ready to receive equally and with indifference from His hand the sweet and the bitter. All would please that came from Him. The sorest afflictions never appear intolerable, except when we see them in the wrong light. When we see them as dispensed by the hand of God, when we know that it is our loving

Father who abases and distresses us, our sufferings lose all their bitterness and our mourning becomes all joy.

Let all our business be to *know* God; the more one *knows* Him, the more one *desires* to know Him. And as *knowledge* is commonly the measure of *love*, the deeper and more extensive our *knowledge* shall be, the greater will be our *love*; and if our love of God be great, we shall love Him equally in grief and in joy.

Let us not content ourselves with loving God for the mere sensible favors, how elevated soever, which He has done or may do us. Such favors, though never so great, cannot bring us so near to Him as faith does in one simple act. Let us seek Him often by faith. He is within us; seek Him not elsewhere. If we do love Him alone, are we not rude, and do we not deserve blame, if we busy ourselves about trifles which do not please and perhaps offend Him? It is to be feared these *trifles* will one day cost us dear.

Let us begin to be devoted to Him in good earnest. Let us cast everything besides out of our hearts. He would possess them alone. Beg this favor of Him. If we do what we can on our parts, we shall soon see that change wrought in us which we aspire after. I cannot thank Him sufficiently for the relief He has vouchsafed you. I hope from His mercy the favor of seeing Him within a few days.* Let us pray for one another.

I am, in our Lord, Yours, —

February 6, 1691

* He took to his bed two days after, and died within the week.

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